

March 21, 2011

Testimony Regarding Submitted Bill 1196, Section 14

The Haddam Conservation Commission wishes that both the 17 acres in Tylerville and the 87 acres in Higganum remain undeveloped. However, per Chapter 97, Section 7-131a of the Connecticut General Statutes, one of the duties that a conservation commission must perform is to "conduct research into the utilization and possible utilization of land areas of the municipality." Therefore, the Haddam Conservation Commission opinion and rationale on the proposed land swap follows.

Natural resources do not adhere to artificial boundaries set by humans. Similarly, monetary values designated by humans do not often incorporate intangible values associated with the public good, community character, public health, future and/or avoidance costs for potential public water and sewer systems, and pollution management.

Therefore, the Haddam Conservation Commission does not advocate a "dollar for dollar" approach to evaluation of the proposed land swap but rather what makes sense for the long-term benefit of both the citizens and natural resources of Haddam.

The 2007 update of the Haddam Plan of Conservation and Development guides Haddam land use. The overall message of the Plan of Conservation and Development document promotes development in mixed-use village centers and highly discourages residential sprawl.

Relevant are the following Goals from the Plan of Conservation and Development:

- Maintain Woodland and Rural Character of Haddam's Natural Landscape (p. 15)
- Protect Prime Features of Haddam's Natural Landscape (p. 16)
- Enhance Visual Appearance and Vitality of Haddam's Multiple Villages (p. 17)
- Capitalize on Tylerville's Existing Commercial Nature and Close Proximity to Cultural Attractions (p. 46)

The Haddam Conservation Commission supports the land swap as long as the bill language for the swap and subsequent actions by all parties satisfies the following conditions:

- The entire 87 acres of privately owned land off High Street in Higganum become part of Cockaponsett State Forest.
- In addition to fee ownership by the State of Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, a conservation easement on the 87 acres to a

conservation organization such as the Haddam Land Trust or Connecticut Forest and Park Association reinforces that the 87 acres will remain as conservation land in perpetuity and not developed. To guarantee permanent conservation, both fee ownership with deed restrictions and a conservation easement are recommended by conservation experts.

- There are no residual provisions for residential development of any of the 87 acres in Higganum as part of the swap agreement.
- Any subsequent development of the Tylerville parcel will follow Haddam Zoning Regulations and Gateway Zone Regulations and, if extant, Tylerville Village Zoning Regulations. Although the development process must follow the appropriate regulations and processes, reinforcement in the property deed may also be necessary.

The Haddam Conservation Commission feels strongly that this unique opportunity to form a conservation corridor or "greenway" with the nearby State Forest should be realized. Trails can lead from Higganum Center through Cockaponsett Forest. The land will be available for wildlife habitat, hunting, and passive recreation. Development brings fragmentation of the forest and introduction of impervious surfaces and lawn. Avoidance of these changes will promote groundwater recharge for Higganum Center, the other designated center for development in Haddam. The view of the ridge line will remain unbroken forest and not be dotted with homes. Haddam has enough residential dwellings and does not need (relatively) pristine land to become homes that specifically benefit the developer and not necessarily the greater good of the citizens of Haddam.

Haddam Conservation Commission

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